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*Intelligence Note*

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH **F750002-0959**

October 21, 1969

To : The Secretary  
 Through: S/S  
 From : INR - George C. Denney, Jr. *h.c.d.l.*

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 PA/HO Department of State  
 E.O. 12958, as amended  
 April 21, 2005

Subject: SOMALIA: Military Coup


Somali Proverb: A force of cavalry  
 will always find ungarded camels.

The apparently bloodless coup which overthrew the government of Somalia came within 24 hours of the burial of assassinated President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke and put an end to the efforts of civilian politicians to reach agreement on a new president. One of the last states in Africa with legitimate claim to a democratic system of government has now turned to military rule. The takeover is likely to endanger the politically courageous attempt, launched two years ago by Shermarke and his Prime Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, to ease Somalia's irredentist problems through detente with Kenya and Ethiopia.

The Coup. The army moved early on October 21, 1969, to seize control

of the government, the radio, transport centers and other key installations. Later, a Revolutionary Council, composed of army and police, proclaimed a state of emergency, dissolved the National Assembly, and suspended the Constitution. All ministers--presumably including Egal--are under house arrest.

The Revolutionary Council announced over Radio Mogadiscio that it would "respect all treaties



General Siad

and agreements made with friendly countries...maintain a policy of non-alignment, self-determination, and non-interference...and provide help and support to all freedom fighters."



General Korshor

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*PO L 23-9 SOMALI XR POL 29 SOMALI XR DEF 19-6 USSR -*

*XR POL 15 SOMALI*

*XR POL 1 SOMALI*

report was produced by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Aside from normal substantive exchange with agencies at the working level, it has not been coordinated elsewhere.

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Motivation. Coup leaders claim **to** have acted in order to put an end to widespread corruption and to "abolish tribalism." The new regime's desire to support freedom fighters suggests that discontent with the detente may also have been a motive.

Leadership. Given the army's power, it is probably the senior partner in its alliance with the police. According to a regime spokesman, Major General Mohamed Siad Barre, the army commandant, and Major General Jama Ali Korshel, the police commandant, are working closely together on the Council. The names of additional members are not yet available. Siad, an outspoken critic of the detente, and Korshel may have engineered the coup or may turn out to be figureheads for a younger group of officers.

Implications. In defiance of Egal's policy, Siad's army has in the past, undercut the detente with Ethiopia by covertly arming Arussi Galla rebels operating in Southwestern Ethiopia. It is generally believed that most army officers, and perhaps a number of police, have looked unfavorably upon the detente. As a consequence, a return to the expansionist policies of the pre-Egal era may be in store. Even should a newly-emergent group of army leaders be willing to experiment further with the detente, they would encounter reawakened Ethiopian suspicions.

The coup may also provide increased opportunities for the Soviets. A large percentage of army officers have undergone training in the Soviet Union. While it is doubtful that a significant number are communists, many may be susceptible to Soviet influence. Furthermore, army officers have long yearned

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for more sophisticated military equipment to offset Ethiopia's superior forces and may now wish to acquire greater military aid from the Soviets. The Soviets might well comply with the request of an irredentist Somali regime, particularly in view of the American presence in Ethiopia.

Somalia's nomadic tribes are heavily armed and could resist army authority. Moreover, the army is tribally divided and could itself be hard put to maintain its unity should serious tribal disorders develop. The emergence of tribal tension, ever present in Somalia, coupled with the political upheavals of recent days could usher in a period of serious unrest.

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